

Tobacco trafficking: blaming manufacturers is targeting the wrong culprit

Paris – March 2026 – Following recent statements by Frédéric Valletoux blaming the tobacco industry for the rise in trafficking, BAT France denounces an erroneous analysis that diverts attention from the real perpetrators.

“Tobacco trafficking is not organized by manufacturers. It is organized by criminal networks. Blaming the legal industry means targeting the wrong culprit and weakening the fight against these networks,” says Sébastien Charbonneau, Director of Public & Regulatory Affairs at BAT France.

Today, a significant share of cigarettes consumed in France escapes the legal distribution network. This parallel trade is a widespread, structured phenomenon largely fuelled by criminal organizations.

A trafficking that fuels social insecurity

The illicit tobacco trade is not just a fiscal issue. It fuels underground economic circuits that undermine the legal economy and contribute to insecurity in many regions—a phenomenon regularly documented by French customs authorities and several parliamentary reports dedicated to combating tobacco smuggling¹.

“Tobacco trafficking finances criminal networks, fuels the shadow economy, and weakens legal businesses. It is a matter of public safety as much as public health.”

While legal manufacturers and tobacconists are subject to strict rules on traceability, taxation, and distribution, **products sold on the parallel market evade all controls**. For BAT France, fighting illicit trade requires acknowledging reality.

“Denial will not make trafficking disappear. What we need today is political courage to truly target the criminal networks organizing this trade,” states Sébastien Charbonneau, Director of Public & Regulatory Affairs at BAT France.

BAT France also commends the work of law enforcement and customs services, which play an essential role in combating these networks.

“State services are doing remarkable work against these traffics. But they must be supported with adequate financial resources and strengthened legal tools to counter increasingly structured criminal networks. The parliamentary work currently under discussion in the National Assembly may offer an opportunity to reinforce these measures.”

¹ [Bilan annuel de la douane 2024](#), [Bilan annuel de la douane 2023](#),

[Rapport d'information n° 4498, 29 septembre 2021 relative à l'évolution de la consommation de tabac et du rendement de la fiscalité applicable aux produits du tabac pendant le confinement et aux enseignements pouvant en être tirés](#),

[Rapport n° 1241, 1^{er} avril 2025 sur la proposition de résolution européenne relative à la mise en œuvre du protocole de l'OMS pour éliminer le commerce illicite des produits du tabac](#),

[Rapport d'information n°72, 22 octobre 2022 « Fraude et évasion fiscales : faire les comptes et intensifier la lutte »](#)

The company recalls that **it actively cooperates with customs authorities and law enforcement in the fight against illicit trade** and that all its products sold in Europe are subject to traceability systems compliant with European requirements.

Learning from policies that work

Faced with the rise of illicit trade, **BAT France calls for examining public policies that have proven effective abroad.**

“Some countries have chosen a pragmatic approach, combining tighter control of illegal channels, cooperation with economic actors, and targeted measures. Results show that determined action can significantly reduce parallel trade.”

In Quebec, for example, anti-illicit trade policies have significantly reduced the size of the illegal market in recent years, according to Quebec’s Ministry of Finance.²

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About BAT

BAT is a leading global multi-category consumer goods business. Underpinned by world-leading science and R&D, our purpose is to create A Better Tomorrow™ by Building a Smokeless World where, ultimately, cigarettes have become a thing of the past. BAT’s purpose is backed by Omni™, an evidence-based manifesto for change which captures its commitment and progress.

BAT employs more than 48,000 people and, in 2024, generated revenue of £25.9bn, with an adjusted profit from operations of £11.9bn.

BAT’s aim is to have 50 million adult consumers of its Smokeless products by 2030 and generate 50% of its revenue from Smokeless products by 2035. BAT’s portfolio is made up of a growing range of nicotine and smokeless tobacco products which include its Vapour brand Vuse; Heated Product brand glo; and Velo, its Modern Oral (nicotine pouch) brand. After only a decade of investment in these products, the Group has delivered New Category revenue of £3.4bn in 2024, with strong progress in profitability. BAT’s portfolio reflects our commitment to meeting the evolving and varied preferences of today’s adult consumers.

BAT is also reducing the use of natural resources, improving livelihoods, and delivering on its climate goals to be Net Zero across its value chain by 2050. BAT received a Triple A rating from CDP in 2024 for its disclosures on Climate Change, Water Security, and Forests, showcasing its commitment to environmental transparency and action.

² [Budget 2025-2026 – Renseignements additionnels](#)